

Health center still growing

By Hershel Lamirand

Forty years ago, a group of visionaries saw the potential in land surrounding the University of Oklahoma Medical School and University and Children's hospitals. Could this place be a home for biomedical research, cuttingedge technology and expanded patient care and education? The answer was a resounding "yes," and the dream of the Oklahoma Health Center began to take shape.

These visionaries were people familiar to many Oklahomans: Harvey P. Everest, E.K. Gaylord, Dean A. McGee, Dr. Don O'Donoghue and Stanton L. Young. Along with 22 other Oklahomans, they went to Houston in 1965 to visit the Texas Medical Center, and saw the potential of a dream — the Oklahoma Health Center.

To accelerate construction, the Legislature in 1968 approved a large bond issue called "Health and Education for a Richer Oklahoma," or HERO, which consisted of more than \$31 million dedicated to help finance construction and to use as a federal match on the Oklahoma Health Center campus. HERO went to a vote of the people and passed overwhelmingly by a 3-1 margin.

Forty years later, this 300-plus acre complex is a hub of economic development. The Oklahoma Health Center is an epicenter of research, health care, education, technology and patient care that exists nowhere else in the state or perhaps even in the nation. With the second-largest concentration of employees (more than 12,500) in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Health Center is about jobs — many of them high paying, highly skilled positions.

The health center also represents \$3 billion of capital infrastructure that is constantly growing. Our 30 health-related organizations are constantly adding to or constructing new buildings with new jobs to serve Oklahoma and the world. Right now, \$180 million in physical expansion improvements at OU Medical Center and new research programs at the Sylvan N. Goldman Center/Oklahoma Blood Institute and the Dean A. McGee Eye Institute are under way.

The center is also about patient care and patient education. Our physicians are not only teachers but pioneers in cutting-edge medical techniques. Medical researchers are looking for cures for diseases from Alzheimer's to breast cancer. Revenue resulting from the 2004 passage of State Question 713, the "tobacco tax bill," will allow the Oklahoma Health Center to receive needed funding to construct a National Institutes of Health designated cancer center — the OU Cancer Center. It will be another first for our state.

The value of research science to Oklahoma is paramount to a healthy and progressive future. On average, each research scientist brings about a half-million dollars in out-of-state resources to Oklahoma. A year ago on the campus, Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma and Dr. Elias Zerhouni, director of the National Institutes of Health, announced two major grants for medical research in Oklahoma: a \$17.95 million grant for the OU Health Sciences Center and a \$12 million grant for the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation. This is just one example of how Oklahoma is on the map for research.

The center's achievements are constantly in the news, reported throughout the nation and the world. To learn more, visit our Web site at www.okhealthcenter.com. We invite you to come and take a tour of our beautiful campus and celebrate our 40th anniversary later this year when we

dedicate Founders' Plaza at Stiles Park featuring the Beacon of Hope.

Believe in what the Oklahoma Health Center can do for you!

Lamirand is executive director of the Oklahoma Health Center Foundation.



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